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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model or framework of marital adjustment, for both the researcher and the practitioner, which provides description, explanation, and modification, i.e., ways in which the model can be changed that are theoretically connected with the description and the explanation. A typology of relationship processes is proposed which includes overt behaviors, covert behaviors, stimulous and response conditions, and methods of communication. The relationship skills which use the proposed processes are described including objectification, support/understanding, problem solving, and behavior change. A propositional inventory is presented which relates each relationship skill to marital adjustment. Relevant research is discussed for each hypothesis. The last section of the paper suggests parallels between the proposed behavioral model and systems theories, and points out the advantages of the behavioral model. Criticisms of the model are answered by emphasizing that it has been formulated at the microlevel, and should not be considered inadequate because it does not deal with macrophenomena, e.g., socioeconomic status and social resources. (JAC)

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A BEHAVIORAL SYSTEMS CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RELATIONSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENT

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A Behavioral Systems Conceptualization of Relationship Accomplishment*

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INTRODUCTION

While marital adjustment has been one of the most widely researched and written-about topics in family studies, there are relatively few integrated theories which can guide practice as well as research. In general, the practice-oriented theories are difficult to research and the research-based theories are not relevant to the practitioner. This need not be the case. Baltes and his colleagues (1977) suggest that a body of scientific knowledge should have three parts: description, explanation, and modification. In turn, each part answers what it looks like, where it comes from, and how it can be changed. While the existing research-based theories of marital adjustment describe marital adjustment fairly well and specify what it looks like in different subpopulations, they are less adequate in suggesting ways it can be modified that are theoretically connected with the description and explanation. Without theoretical statements as to how a phenomenon can be changed, the utility of a theory for the practitioner is negligible. There is no reason why theoretical discussions of marriage cannot be generated which will provide description, explanation, and modification for both the researcher and the practitioner. The present paper offers one such framework.

The theory is labeled a behavioral-systems approach because it is drawn to a great extent from the work of Robert Weiss by that same name (Weiss, 1978; 1981). It is behavioral in the sense that the terminology of behaviorism is chosen as the most complete, precise and concise set of descriptors of human behavior. It is systemic in that the marriage is examined as an interrelated system of interacting spouses. However, as will be seen in the full model, the characteristics of the individuals themselves, as well as their history will be taken into account. Therefore, the label could be a behavioral-systems-analytic perspective. These unique features will be pointed out below.

Jacobson (1979) identifies three behavioral assumptions about the development of marital distress. These appear to be integral to the perspective. They are: (1) Because marriage requires some exchange of reinforcement, marital distress will be associated with low rates of positive reinforcement and high rates of punishment. (2) Marital distress is due to deficiencies in problem-solving and behavior change with aversive control tactics predominating. (3) There will be a more immediate type of reciprocity in distressed as compared to nondistressed relationships. Recent reviews shed light on the strength of the support for these positions (Gottman, 1979; Jacobson, 1979; Markman, Notarius, Stephen, & Smith, 1981).

While those issues remain important to a degree, there are a number of sharp divergences from the original model, many of these arising from incisive critiques of behavioral marital therapy (Gurman, 1978; Gurman & Knudson, 1978: Gurman & Kniskern, 1978; Gurman, Knudson & Kniskern, 1978). The divergences follow: (1) Most noticeable is the inclusion of covert behaviors into the model. This allows for a closer examination of cognitions, attributions, and expectations. It is consistent with the swing in psychology toward a cognitive behaviorism (Mahoney, 1974; Meichenbaum, 1977; Mischel, 1973), as well as among

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the behavioral marital therapists (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Margolin, 1981; Weiss, 1981). (2) The role of eliciting stimuli in marriage is increased. Married partners elicit strong emotional reactions, sometimes because of past associations. This is consistent with much of the broader work in social learning theory (Bandura, 1969). (3) The organism must be taken into account. Humans are reflexive beings and their interaction involves a complex reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978) wherein they engage in self-selection of environments in which to act as well as receive stimulation from the environment. The present model rejects a false dichotomy between individual and dyadic levels of analysis (Gurman, 1978; Gurman et al., 1978) and suggests that in the study of marriage both are necessarily integrated. This interplay of individual and systemic phenomena is consistent with other social learning perspectives (Bandura, 1978).

The plan for the discussion is to present a typology of relationship processes and relationship skills. A propositional inventory is formed relating each relationship skill to marital adjustment. Relevant research is discussed under each hypothesis. The last section of the paper suggests further parallels to systems theorists and offers a critical overview of the model.

RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES

Relationship accomplishment involves four levels of skills and of four relationship processes within each skill level. The relationship processes are: (1) overt behaviors; (2) covert behaviors; (3) stimulus and response conditions; and (4) methods of communication.

Overt behaviors

Spouses present each other with the presence or absence of overt behaviors. Many of these are received by the other spouse as pleasurable or displeasurable. The behavioral systems conceptualization of marriage suggests that marriage is a union of two individuals for whom there is some expectation that life together will be more pleasurable than likely alternatives, including being single. Moreover, it is too costly to break up and to find alternatives. This is more than just a behavioral economics. The benefits foreseen in the relationship can range from physical pleasures to the pleasure of meeting one's expectations as to what sort of life one should have. In this last sense, the present model is intended to be applicable to traditional as well as egalitarian relationships, a position which differs from that put forward by Weiss (1978).

Covert behaviors

Because of the long reinforcement history and the level of intimacy which entails other associations, as well, almost every behavior can be emotionally laden and full of meaning. This aspect of intimacy cannot be ignored. Covert behaviors refer to the internal processing of responses to stimuli. Bandura (1969) states that, "Social-learning approaches treat internal processes as covert events that are manipulable and measurable" (p. 10). He goes on to discuss stimulus control of autonomic responsiveness and instrumental behavior and the symbolic regulation of behavior involved in the use of verbal mediators,

imaginal mediators, and arousal mediators. Behaviors included here are self-statements, expectations, attributions, appraisals, self-reinforcement, interpretations, and the variety of emotional responses, e.g., anger, love, and fear (Bandura, 1977; 1978). These notions have already entered the family field (e.g., Doherty, 1981; Filsinger, Note 1).

Spouses invariably interpret both their own and their partner's behaviors. As Jacobson and Margolin (1979) state, "People talk to themselves, they appraise their environments, and they make attributions and interpretations of their world. These self-statements, appraisals, and attributions mediate and moderate the effects of environmental stimuli or behavior, and can serve either as eliciting or discriminative stimuli" (p. 12). The reward value of spouse's behavior is set by the recipient of a behavior. Both intrinsic and extrinsic criteria are used by the spouses in their cognitive appraisals of the relationship; they function as standards against which the relationship is judged (Jacobson, 1979).

A long history goes into determining this interpretation. Distressed couples frequently view any behavior by spouse as negative, no matter the originator's intent (Weiss, 1981). It should be kept in mind that these cognitions can themselves be viewed as behaviors which are under control of the principles of reinforcement (Mahoney, 1974; Meichenbaum, 1977).

Stimulus and Response Control

Stimulus control refers to the fact that much of our behavior is under the control of either eliciting or discriminative stimuli. Present behavior can be related to both proximal and distal causes, the latter being conditioned arousal resulting from causes in one's past rather than the present situations (Baltes et al., 1977). Eliciting stimuli directly bring about a response. One spouse can elicit conditioned anxiety in the other spouse when a certain behavior is emitted. On the other hand, love may be a conditioned positive elicitation. Discriminative stimuli indicate that a reinforcer is likely to occur; therefore making it more likely that the operant which preceeds the reinforcer will be emitted. When weight watchers are instructed to eat in one location only, that location serves as a discriminative stimulus for eating behavior. If more locations were chosen for eating behavior, e.g., a chair in front of the TV or a bed, those locations will also serve as a stimulus for eating behavior and lead to over-eating. Couples may have trouble keeping attention in problem solving sessions if they choose a situation which discriminates a lot of other activities, e.g., a bed. They may do better to choose a particular set of chairs away from other distractions for their problem solving sessions.

Stimulus control is not limited to external events. Thoughts can be powerful stimuli (Bandura, 1969). Family roles and family rules serve as discriminative stimuli which set the stage for whole response chains. Perceiving oneself as a parent in a situation leads to a set of behaviors for which certain response contingencies can be expected. Likewise formal and informal rules guide behavior. Recognition that a particular situation fits a certain rule serves as a stimulus for the behavior that follows. Weiss (1978) states that, "Rules are the highest embodiment of stimulus control: Behavior guided by rule exception is analogous to control of a super list. Traditional relationships provide ready-made rules which are condensed into a single stimulus - mother, wife, provider" (p. 194). A similar line of thinking is offered by Bircher & Spinks (1980) in translating systems.

conceptualizations of family rules into behavioral terms.

One of the difficulties with nontraditional relationships is that there are fewer rules given to govern any specific situation. Instead, more negotiation about more decisions must take place (Chafetz, 1980). The result is that nontraditional relationships may have high levels of response control. Response control means that, lacking the stimulus properties of knowing what behavior is appropriate next, the actor's behavior is governed by the reinforcing qualities of spouse's next behavior, the response. Fighting is an excellent example of this response sequencing.

In discussing the two types of control Weiss (1978) suggests that, "... for couples who successfully provide relationship satisfaction..., functioning is rule-controlled. Rule based exchange achieves parity over time, not on a moment-to-moment basis of reciprocity; point-for-point exchange reciprocity suggests that a relationship has shifted to reinforcing control rather than stimulus control. When satisfactions are low, one carefully tracks payoffs. The partners force a payoff matrix that is response contingent: Where the hell is my affection?" (p. 195).

Methods of Communication

Once the benefits and the situations in which they occur have been recognized, it is necessary that the couple has modes of communicating about their respective needs. This is the fourth relationship process. The communication can be verbal or nonverbal, public or private. It is distinct from the previously mentioned processes in that it is reflexive to the relationship or to the process of interaction. Some of the specific communication skills that relate to this aspect of the interaction are elaborated below in the discussion of relationship skills.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The four areas of skills in relationship accomplishment are: (1) objectification, (2) support/understanding, (3) problem solving, and (4) behavior change.

Objectification

Objectification refers to the skills necessary to make reliable discriminations in the behavioral environment. This skill can be applied to each one of the four processes of relationships.

Overt behaviors. At the level of concrete behaviors, spouses daily provide each other with a stream of activity that has pleasurable to displeasurable valences attached to each behavior. Whether or not any given spousal behavior is received as pleasurable, neutral, or displeasurable depends upon a wide range of variables ranging from events which are intrinsicly pleasurable to events which may meet personal or role expectations. Many of these events are taken for granted, e.g., coming home, preparing dinner, sleeping together.

Spouses are notoriously poor at tracking each other's behavior (Weiss, 1978). They are often wrong about the frequency of some undesired behavior, "He does it all the time." They also are frequently wrong about the frequency of positive behaviors, e.g., "You never tell me anything nice," when in fact compliments have been presented. Therapy can aid the spouses in tracking the actual rates of their partner's behaviors and help them to separate the actual, observable behavior from the interpretations they make about behaviors. Too frequently distressed couples appear to solely track the negative behaviors of spouse.

It is important that the focus is on concrete behaviors rather than global judgments. Spouses can answer responses to a single category label "affection" in a way that perpetuates a myth, whereas answering to "gave hug," "asked how my day went," or "said something nice" force a reevaluation of what actually transpired. The notion of "documenting" sense data fits here (Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1975).

Covert behaviors. The cognitive activity associated with objectification involves making denotatively correct attributions and tracking one's own cognitions and visceral behaviors. This entails being able to separate denotative and connotative meanings and being able to focus on what was actually said. This is important because spouses can develop systematically distorted interpretations of their partner's behavior. For example, no matter what is said, it is taken to be a criticism. Tracking one's own cognitions may be important. Self-control training requires careful monitoring of one's thoughts so that dysfunctional cognitions can be identified. On the other hand, one may learn to use negative thoughts or negative internal states to one's own benefit. For example, anxiety may be a useful cue that a stress threshold has been reached. Rejuvenation may follow identification of mental conflict.

Stimulus and response control. Seldom are spouses consciously aware of the stimulus conditions associated with positive behaviors, yet they are often all too knowledgeable about the stimulus conditions necessary to set off an aversive interchange. Discriminations must be made as to the situations which reliably lead to pleasant things versus those which reliably lead to negative things. While knowing what leads to what will not necessarily ensure performance, the discrimination is a necessary prior condition for the eventual performance. Part of this discrimination can be the recognition of distal causes of ones present emotional upheaval, e.g., "When you do that you are acting just like Uncle Jack! I hated it when he did that!"

Communication. A goal in the objectification of the communication process is to use modes of communicating which reflect the specificity of the discriminations made in the other processes. Weiss and Birchler (1978) advise the use of parroting (word-by-word playback), summarizing, effective opening statements, pinpointing, and modality checking. In describing these communications they state, "Partners may 'talk over' one another so badly that they fail to receive the words of the other. Parroting forces a word-by-word playback and also forces turn-taking in conversation. A behavioral pinpoint is a statement made in object language and in an accelerate mode: 'It pleases me when you do X or Y, '... Modality checking refers to the objectification procedure which determines whether one person wishes to 'express feelings' or to 'problem solve'" (Weiss & Birchler, 1978: 338).

In sum, the central focus of the objectification skill area is the knowledge in some objective sense of the dynamics of the relationship. Relationship distress often follows from false beliefs and perceptions about that nature of the relationship process. Olson (1981) has identified both an outsider's and an insider's perspective on relationships. The goal of objectification is to give the couple the ability to transcend their own perspectives by making them an object for themselves rather than just a subject. It may be that part of the utility in this activity is analagous to the benefits received from paradox in systems therapy - different perspectives are obtained from a fresh light. But moreover, it presents the spouse with good hard evidence that cannot be easily refuted. "Here are the data," is a statement which is difficult to challenge.

Support/Understanding

These skills are related to the provision of benefits in the appropriate situations with communication of personal understanding of the subjective meanings the events have for partner. Not only is knowledge of the dynamics of the relationship necessary for accomplishment, the knowledge must be applied and delivered. Benefits must be exchanged, appropriate cognitions emitted, situations selected in order to provide benefits, and communication modes must be utilized in order to facilitate delivery of the benefits.

Overt behaviors. Accomplished couples will be able to please their spouse. The nature of pleasures is wide ranging. They can be outward manifestations of appreciation or they may be the meeting or role expectations. Some couples require remedial training in pleasure giving. The "Cookie Jar", filled with nice things the spouses would like to see from each other, and "Love Days", during which the rate of pleasure is to be increased, are examples of skills training in this area.

While the focus of behavioral marital therapy has frequently been on increasing the rate of positive behaviors, it should not be overlooked that frequently distress results directly from negative behaviors. The rate of negative behaviors can be decreased, but contrary to some statements of the behavioral position (Weiss, 1978), it is doubtful that distressed couples should be called skillful at giving negative behaviors. Gurman and his colleagues (1978) suggest that such couples are very unskillful at delivering negatives because they tend to do so in a destructive way whereas more skillful presentations of negative feelings may result in the couple reaping the benefits of catharsis observed by many therapists. Catharsis itself may be seen as pleasurable resulting from the negative reinforcement of discontinuing the anxiety-producing internal thoughts, i.e., expressing the negative feelings may end them. Not receiving the expected punishment following the expression of negative feelings because the expression has been done skillfully likely increases feelings of self-efficacy as well.

Covert behaviors. Events in a relationship not only have an objective meaning, they also have a subjective meaning. The subjective meaning is the private meaning the event has to an actor. These interpretations are not necessarily true, but they have important stimulus properties for the actor's behavior. Knowledge of the subjective meaning of events is also important to the spouse's understanding of the stimulus and subsequent responses. Empathy is therefore necessary.

Understanding should not only be of one's partner, it should also be of oneself. Sensitivity to one's needs, selection of situations in which to act, and self-reinforcement (doing nice things for oneself) are all part of wise living.

Stimulus and response control. Perhaps the best strategy in keeping one's life straight is to keep one's discriminative stimuli straight. Couples should be able to schedule quality time together, away from other distracting stimuli. Knowledge of eliciting stimuli should also be used in the function of support/understanding. It may be wise to avoid those topics which produce negative emotion when you are desiring to give support/understanding. The stimuli can be internally generated as well as generated from external locations (Bandura, 1978). A judicious amount of self-control and self-selection can ensure an arrangement of stimuli which maximizes the rewarding aspects of a relationship. Expressions of support as well as negative feelings for partner can be saved for the appropriate occasion. This entails using one's knowledge about one's own stimulus affects on partner for the betterment of the relationship.

Communication. Communicating knowledge about spouse's private meanings, e.g., paraphrasing, is a primary way of showing support and understanding. It does not mean confirmation of the truth value of the interpretation; rather, it is an indication that the meaning of the message is understood.

Understanding of self can also be communicated. Self-disclosure would fit here. There is quite a debate over the utility of the expression of negative feelings. Many behaviors shun the expression of negative feelings (Weiss, 1978; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979). They cite evidence that expressing negative feelings leads to increased negative expression rather than the cathartic release. That research may not be entirely valid. Catharsis does not refer to other-directed expression; rather it is the release of negative feelings in a way that is cathartic for the individual, a way which may be quite idiosyncratic and not particularly susceptible to experimental manipulation of non-salient events. Carman (1978) suggests that negative self-disclosure of feelings toward partner can be done skillfully and when so done is positive for both the individual and the relationship. As briefly outlined above, catharsis can be seen as negative reinforcement - one gets rid of the aversive stimuli one has been carrying inside.

Problem Solving

Problem solving skills enable goal attainment. These skills are related to optimizing the flow of benefits, delineating situations in which to solve problems, developing rules for reaching decisions, and understanding what outcome behavioral alternatives entail.

Overt behaviors. Relationships accomplish tasks, as well as exchange benefits. This task accomplishment is called problem solving. Basic problem solving and decision making strategies are offered in beginning family living courses. These behaviors include such steps as defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, evaluating alternatives, and selecting and implementing the chosen solution. The lower level skills of objectification and support/understanding are necessary in order to carry it off. Honest discussions are fine and may leave the spouses feeling better toward each other, but the problems

are often left unsolved. In order to solve problems, objectification and support/understanding are necessary components; however, they are not sufficient conditions.

Covert behaviors. An important class of cognitions that relate to problem solving is outcome expectations. An outcome expectation is a belief held about the likelihood that a given behavior will produce a given outcome (Bandura, 1977; Filsinger, Note 1; Weiss, 1981). Part of decision making is the generation and evaluation of alternatives. The expectations the couple holds concerning the connection between behaviors and outcomes are important for achieving those outcomes. Judicial control and expression of both negative and positive feelings may be necessary for effective problem solving.

Stimulus and response control. Benefits and situations must be arranged such that they produce solutions. Objectives must be defined and resources marshalled. One aspect of this, for example, is to set aside periods of time for agenda building and for decision making. An agenda building session lays out the problems and selects an order for working on them. A decision making session should be focused on one problem using agreed upon rules for reaching a decision. In this way distractions from other discriminative or eliciting stimuli can be avoided.

Communication. Some of the communication skills associated with problem solving are the identification of rewards, agenda and administrative sessions, fight control skills and task-oriented statements. Rules for handling problem solving can be stated and agreed upon. It should be kept in mind that the benefits gained in long-term relationships are fundamentally distinct from those obtainable in short-term relationships. A long-term relationship such as marriage must produce benefits to the individuals while also providing for the continuation of the relationship. In short-term relationships, a big payoff can be taken even if it destroys the relationship itself. Commitment to the future of the relationship then becomes an important variable defining problem solving capacity.

Behavior Change

Behavior change involves skills related to producing relationship change based on knowledge of benefits, situations conductive to change, and rules for effecting the change, as well as arranging expectations about the possibility of achieving change. Whereas problem-solving obtains goals, behavior change focuses on the relationship. It should be noted that the discussion to follow departs from Weiss' (1978). He does not distinguish separate relationship processes and focuses instead on the use of negotiating and contracting.

Overt behaviors. Couples frequently rely on aversive procedures to bring about desired changes in their relationship. Undesired behavior is followed by aversive stimuli, e.g., "That was a dumb thing to do!" The aversive stimuli is continued in hopes of negatively reinforcing some other behavior. Unfortunately, the release of negative stimuli in a closed system usually leads to negative reciprocation (Patterson & Hops, 1972). The spouse responds in kind. Rather than preaching effective fighting, the behavioral systems approach emphasizes procedures for solving problems and changing behavior prior to the escalation into negative reciprocation (Weiss & Birchler, 1978). However, a judicious use of skillful negative feedback may also be effective

in producing behavior change (cf. Gurman, 1978), but it should be advocated with considerable caution.

Covert behaviors. One of the features which has been thought to distinguish the behavioral and the systems theories and treatments is the latter's emphasis on family rules and changes in context, both related to cognitions. In fact, the behavioral systems approach takes these factors into account. A variable which helps considerably is the notion of efficacy expectations. Individuals hold beliefs about the likelihood that they will be able to emit the behaviors necessary to change. A lot of resistance found in couple therapy is the belief that, "It won't do any good anyway." These are expectations about the behavior change process.

It may also be functional for constructive change to use one's knowledge about the covert behaviors resulting from the eliciting properties of spousal behavior to gain control over those covert behaviors. Some treatment akin to covert desensitization may be particularly effective in bringing about desired change in covert behaviors (Bandura, 1969).

Stimulus and response control. Situations can be self-selected and/or arranged in order to obtain desired change. One may learn that one's spouse is most responsive to change after something nice has been done. One may also learn that one's spouse, or oneself, is most responsive to change after an expression of pent-up negative feelings.

Earlier it was mentioned that rules are really discriminative stimuli for behavior sequences. In order to change the context (the rules), it is necessary to change the discriminative stimuli. Suggesting new ways to look at a problem changes the stimulus situation. Reverse role taking is an example of changing the rules. It also can be seen as changing the situational cues and ways these cues are interpreted.

Communication. When a behavior or behavior sequence is targeted for change, it is first necessary to have employed the lower-level skills of objectification and support/understanding. However, those skills in themselves are not always sufficient to produce desired change in the relationships. Instead it is necessary to know how to use the exchange of benefits, situational control, and establishment of rules for change in order to bring about the desired change. Weiss and Birchler (1978) argue that the basic format for this is negotiation and contracting.

The use of behavior contracts by behavioral therapists is one well-known manifestation of the theoretical position. Such contracts are often formed implicitly in a wide-range of therapies. For example, anytime a spouse offers, "I'll do this if you do that," a contract relating to the exchange of benefits has been offered. The behavioral approach with its emphasis on objectivity, clarity and accountability moves the next step toward formality by writing the conditions of the contract down. The position is that distressed couple requires remedial training in the skills of negotiation and contracting so that the explicit contract is desirable. Weiss and Birchler (1978) offer an overview of the rationale for contracts as well as their positive benefits. The upshot of this is that fairly objective and formal procedures for communicating about the change process are skills married couples should have in their behavioral repertoire.

SUMMARY

Table 1 presents a heuristic representation of the model. Keywords have been selected in order to intuitively describe what is the central feature of each cell which results from crossing the principles of relationship processes and the relationship accomplishments. The table does not reflect the full model as such, but can be seen as a sensitizing device.

Table 1

Keywords in describing the interaction between

relationship processes and relationship accomplishments

	Relationship Accomplishments			
Relationship Processes	objectification	support/ understanding	problem solving	behavior change
overt behaviors	identifying	giving and taking	solving	changing
covert behaviors	knowing	empathy	outcome expectations	efficacy expectations
stimulus and response control	description	utilization	control	arrangement
communication	specificity	caring	task orientation	negotiation

HYPOTHESES

The focus for the behavioral systems approach is on the interaction between the partners. It is here that relationship issues are formed and manifest and where characteristics of the individual become active for the relationship. Based on the Spouse Observation Checklist (Patterson, 1976) and similar categories of others (Azrin, Naster, & Jones, 1973), Weiss (1978) suggests 12 areas of marital interaction: companionship, affection, consideration, sex, communication process, coupling activities, child care and parenting, household management, financial decision making, employment/education, personal habits and appearance and, self and spouse independence. He further conceptualizes the model of relationship accomplishment as being a cube with 12 vertical categories of interaction, 4 horizontal relationship skills, and 4 or more stages of the family life cycle. The implication of his model is that relationship accomplishment, for instance, involves successful skill resolution in each area of interaction during each phase of the life cycle. For example, objectification of self and spouse independence shortly after marriage may be particularly threatening. However, it may avoid distress resulting from that area several years down the line.

The stated task for this paper was to produce hypotheses of relationship accomplishment based on this model. However, a 12 X 4 X 4 cube produces 96 cells, each conceivably generating a hypothesis. Many of these hypotheses would appear redundant due to similarity of content. Therefore, the task was simplified by using the four relationship accomplishments as the basic variables to be related to marital adjustment. Where there was evidence that given areas of marital interaction might be differentially affected, those areas are highlighted. In addition, the discussion of each hypothesis is structured in terms of the four relationship processes.

H_1 - Objectification is positively related to marital adjustment.

Overt behaviors. In order to test this hypothesis, it must be possible to rate couples on their attempts at objectification - are they better or worse than others at discriminating the behaviors in their relationships? Weiss (1981) cites some literature which shows that indicating pleasure or displeasure with certain areas of interaction is more or less related to marital satisfaction, but it seems that work does not address differences between couples as to their relative skill in objectification of benefits. However, there is some evidence that nondistressed couples tend to check more pleasures and displeasures on the Spouse Observation Checklist than do distressed couples (Weiss & Isaac, Note 2). This could be interpreted that nondistressed couples do in fact see more of the exchange of the specific dynamics of their relationships.

Another source of support for the position that objectification helps adjustment is the position that the mere act of having couples engage in tracking the pleasures and displeasures in their relationships as a homework assignment can be therapeutic (Weiss & Margolin, 1977). While tracking is part of several treatment packages (e.g., Markman & Lloyd, 1980; Weiss & Birchler, 1978), it has not been separated to test its independent effects. The question can be raised as to whether the area of interaction makes a difference in the hypothesized relationship. To date no evidence has been offered on this question.

Covert behaviors. The meaning of the hypothesis here is whether or not couples who make more denonatively correct cognitive appriasals have higher marital adjustment. It could also be phrased in terms of self awareness. It would appear that some of the literature on spousal accuracy in person perception is relevant here. Spouses that are able to judge each other more in line with how they see themselves tend to have higher dyadic adjustment (Newmark, Woody, & Ziff, 1977), though objective similarity may be a factor. The accuracy of person perception would seem to be quite close the meaning of making a denotatively correct attributions. The central feature of objectification in this case is whether or not the couple can accurately discriminate the elements in their covert behaviors. Spousal confirmation can serve to validate the measure.

Stimulus and response control. Ability to discriminate in this area would entail being able to identify accurately the various stimulus conditions which precede which responses as well as being able to identify the consequences of alternative behaviors. To this writer's knowledge a direct correlation between a measure of this ability and marital adjustments has not been done.

It would seem that one aspect of testing this dimension would be to ask husbands and wives about their knowledge of the antecedents and the consequences of actions and then to match these responses with their spouse's judgments as to the same actions. Agreement between spouses would be one consensual indication of the reliability of their discriminations. Spouses in nondistressed relationships might be expected to show higher scores.

Communication. The implication of the hypothesis is that better adjusted marriages will also be able to communicate the objectifications they make. Communication techniques such as pinpointing, parroting, and summarizing are relevant here (Weiss, 1978; Weiss & Birchler, 1978). Each of these techniques is meant to focus on exactly what was said. No element of interpretation is added. Spouses too frequently function at the level of interpretations rather than what was actually said. The Minnesota Marital Communication Program (Miller et al., 1975) also separates sense data from interpretations.

One way to test the hypothesis at this level would be to compare distressed with nondistressed couples on their tendencies to employ the denotative techniques described above. Again, to this writer's knowledge, that test has not been conducted directly. Treatments with and without the objectification component have not been done. The existing coding systems used in studies of marital interaction generally do not look for objectification. Kahn (1970) did find a relationship between marital satisfaction and the accuracy of nonverbal communication. This would seem to be some evidence that denotatively correct perceptions aid marital adjustment.

H_2 - Support/Understanding is positively related to marital adjustment.

Overt behaviors. There is ample evidence that the exchange of benefits is related to marital adjustment. While evidence from objective observations of greater rates of negative behaviors, as well as negative reciprocity, being displayed by distressed couples compared to nondistressed couples is fairly agreed upon, there is less consistent evidence that distressed versus nondistressed couples differ on rates of positive behavior (See Markman et al., 1981 for a summary of this literature). However, observations by spouses tend to suggest that distressed couples do have a significantly greater likelihood of perceiving their partner's behavior as negative and are significantly less likely to see positive behaviors as compared to the perceptions of nondistressed spouses. Because this literature is well summarized elsewhere and the hypothesis is generally supported, the issue will not be elaborated here. Self-report measures also lend support to this perspective (Lewis & Spanier, 1979).

This is evidence, however, that this area of marital interaction makes a difference in locating the connection between the exchange of benefits. Wills and his colleagues (1974) found that husbands were more influenced by pleasurable instrumental behaviors, whereas wives were more influenced by pleasurable affectional behaviors.

Covert behaviors. The model would predict that distressed couples would tend to engage in more dysfunctional cognitions than would nondistressed couples. Some support for this position has been uncovered. Although it did not directly measure cognitive acts or reports of cognitive acts, Filsinger and Lamke (in press) found that social self-esteem was significantly correlated

with marital adjustment. Positive self-perception could be indicative of positive self-statements. It would seem possible to more directly measure positive and negative cognitions. Treatments which emphasize increasing positive and decreasing negative self-statements have shown considerable progress in a number of areas (Mahoney, 1974; Meichenbaum, 1977).

Recognizing the important role of cognitive appraisals in marital interaction a number of behaviorists have included cognitive treatments in their therapy programs (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Margolin & Weiss, 1978; Markman & Floyd, 1980). Strayhorn (1978) also describes an approach to cognitive restructuring in marital therapy. However, as O'Leary and Turkewitz (1978) note, much more can be done in the use of cognitions in behavioral therapy.

Stimulus and response control. Distressed versus nondistressed relationships have been distinguished in terms of behaviors which seem to fit differential use of stimulus control versus response control. Distressed couples tend to have a greater rigidity in the structure of their behavior, especially in the area of a tit-for-tat reciprocity of negative and positive behaviors (cf. Gottman, 1979; Markman et al., 1981). Nondistressed couples appear to function on more of a "bank-account" model (Gottman, 1979) where levels of positives are kept basically equal over time but immediate responses are not necessarily reciprocal. This gives nondistressed couples a great deal more flexibility and freedom both to try out new behaviors and occasionally make a mistake without severe immediate consequences.

Research is still needed, however, in other areas of stimulus control differences. It could be hypothesized that nondistressed couples would tend to self-select more optimal situations in which to act. There is a right place and time to raise issues. Various therapies suggest setting aside special times to problem solve. The same logic could be applied to self-selection of situations in which to give positives. Simply, we need to know more about how distressed versus nondistressed couples control their environments and how they set up family rules to get the most out of the environment.

Communication. Again, quite a bit of research has been done on such skills as reflective listening, paraphrasing, and feeling statements. Several studies support the position (e.g., Bienvenu, 1970) enough so that Lewis and Spanier (1979) hold it to be a proposition in their theory of marital quality. In reviewing the literature on observational studies of distressed versus nondistressed relationships, Markman and his colleagues (1981) state, "...contrary to expectations, there are few differences between groups in use of behaviors such as disagreement, expression of feelings, mind reading, and summarizing, which the marital therapy literature suggests are important in successful relationships" (p. 248).

Problem Solving

Overt behaviors. According to the definition offered herein, nondistressed relationships should be characterized by an exchange of benefits which leads to more efficient problem solving. The observation studies of marital interaction which have been done to not address specifically whether or not benefits are arranged so that achieving goals is more easy in nondistressed relationships, although this would be a testable hypothesis.

In contrast, problem solving effectiveness has been widely researched within the sociological tradition of family research (Klein & Hill, 1979). More often

than not, the issues explored here have not addressed marital adjustment. Reiss has offered a program of research which looks at different aspects of family interaction and problem solution as it relates to psychological disturbances of family members (e.g., Reiss, 1971). Still, the specific feature of an exchange of benefits as it relates to effective problem solving has not been addressed.

Covert behaviors. While the role of functional versus dysfunctional cognitions in marital problem solving as it relates to marital adjustment has not been directly addressed, there is some evidence that cognitive variables may be important. Reiss and his colleagues have conducted an extensive research program into the consensual experience of family members. They have related, among other things, social constructions of the family's perception of other families and the family's perception of the psychiatric ward to their problem solving competence (Reiss, Costell, Berkman, & Jones, 1980; Costell, Reiss, Berkman & Jones, 1981). In their extensive review of the family problem-solving effectiveness literature, Klein and Hill (1979) cite a number of cognitive variables, e.g., self-esteem, phrasing rationality, and summarize the existing evidence as to on findings connected with them. However, the issue as to whether certain types of cognitive appraisals within problem solving positively or negatively affect marital adjustment is by and large unresearched.

Stimulus and response control. It can be recalled that the behavioral systems perspective suggests that agenda sessions and administrative sessions will facilitate problem solving. This is because it is easier to focus on the specific problem when tasks of the situation are clearly defined. There does not appear to be a set of accompanying research to show that distressed versus nondistressed couples actually utilize situational control in different manners.

On the other hand, there has been evidence as to the importance of centralization of power, coordinative leadership, cultural orientations, legitimacy of power, and expert power (Klein & Hill, 1979). These are basic rules for functioning in the family. It is the perspective taken herein that these family rules are really a highly developed form of stimulus control (cf. Birchler & Spinks, 1980; Weiss, 1979; 1981). Evidence supporting a relationship between those family conventions and problem solving effectiveness supports the position that stimulus control is beneficial to problem solving and to marital adjustment.

Communication. Most of the observation behavioral coding systems have codes referencing problem solving behaviors (Filsinger, Note 3). The findings on these variables are not particularly impressive, though Vincent and his colleagues (1975) and Billings (1979) did find that distressed and nondistressed couples could be distinguished on problem-solving communications. The problem with the problem solving codes is that none of the coding systems have actually shown that those behaviors have the construct validity of being related to measures of problem solving effectiveness. This is surely an area where psychologists and sociologists should get together and lend each other some expertise.

H_4 - Behavior change techniques are positively related to marital adjustment.

Overt behaviors. The research question here is whether or not nondistressed couples are actually superior to distressed couples in their ability to get their partners to change their behavior in a mutually satisfying way. Part of this involves evidence that distressed couples are more likely to use aversive control and coercion (Markman et al., 1981). However, the observational research has not separated the positive and negative behaviors that reflect support/understanding from those that are facilitating behavior change. Degrees of desired change obtained in the partner or the relationship have not been studied, although there is

some evidence as to the effectiveness of negotiating and contracting. It would seem possible to have spouses provide self-reports of their satisfaction with the change process.

Covert behaviors. There is some evidence that gaining control over the thinking process can be beneficial to marital adjustment. Margolin and Weiss (1978) reported that a treatment group with included procedures to change attitudes as well as behaviors showed significantly higher marital satisfaction, pleasing behaviors, and positive communications than did a nonspecific treatment group or a behavioral group. The behavioral-attitudinal group underwent cognitive restructuring.

Efficacy expectations have not been studied as facilitative of behavioral change within marriage, but there is evidence of their importance in a variety of studies on individuals (Bandura, 1978). Research is definitely needed on this issue.

Stimulus and response control. Studies have not specifically investigated whether or not nondistressed couples tend to use their knowledge of stimuli and responses to bring about more satisfactory change than do distressed couples. There is not even very specific evidence that couples engage in more beneficial change when they are trained to use their knowledge of situational cues to enhance behavior change. Indeed, this state of affairs is due primarily to treatments not isolating this factor for testing.

Communication. Several outcome studies have been done which suggest that fairly formal training in negotiating and contracting is related to beneficial relationship change (cf. Jacobson, 1979). To some extent, the above three factors (overt behaviors, covert behaviors, and stimulus and response control) are essential ingredients of negotiating and contracting. As an example of these studies, Jacobson (1977) found that behavioral training in problem solving and contracting was superior to nonspecific training or a waiting list control group in achieving beneficial relationship change.

DISCUSSION

Up to this point in the discussion the presentation has focused on behavioral terms and implications. Although a few examples of the parallels between this model and systems theories have been offered, it may be advantageous to point out several areas in which the present model can describe many of the other important concepts in systems theories. Steinglass (1978) has suggested that there are four basic emphases of systems theories: (1) organization, that is, concerns with wholeness, boundaries, and hierarchy; (2) control, which consists of homeostasis and feedback; (3) energy, that is, entropy and negentropy; and (4) time and space dimensions, which concern patterning.

The behavioral-systems perspective shares with the systems theories a concern for organization. Marital interaction is the focus of much of the research because it is felt that there are emergent properties associated with marital interaction which are not derivable from the separate characteristics of the two spouses. However, there is some difference in the level of wholeness felt necessary. While systems theories tend to examine the whole family, the behavioral systems perspective holds that there are many significant features of marriage which can be addressed without considering the whole family system. As stated by Weiss (1978), "... it would have to be questioned whether the systems view is necessary in all cases of family and marital intervention" (p. 172). However, he also states, "Beyond the assertion that behaviors in one part of the system influence behaviors throughout the system, the systems approach is philosophically compatible with the functionalism of the behavioral models" (Weiss, 1978: 183).

Though not featured in the behavioral-systems approach, boundaries can be thought of as one of two things: (1) the degree to which it is rewarding or punishing for others to engage in approach behavior toward the couple; or (2) the degree to which outside events have stimulus arousing properties for the couple. A relatively closed marriage would be one where it is punishing to approach the dyad and/or the dyad does not acknowledge you as a stimulus deserving a response.

The behavioral-systems perspective is very concerned with control strategies and with how the partners reinforce or punish each other's behavior in order to obtain their own goals. To some extent, the research on reciprocity, especially negative reciprocity, shows how couples exert control strategies such as aversive control which result in system rigidity.

Steinglass (1978) suggests that the most critical concept the systems theorists have gained from a discussion of energy is their concern with information and their subsequent emphasis on communication. The behaviorists have also been quite interested in communication, as their observational coding systems attest. Gottman (1979), for example, has employed informational analysis to streams of behavior.

Related to the point just made, the behavioral-systems approach shares with the various systems theories a concern with the patterning of the marital relationship through space and time. Bowen's (1966) concept of the undifferentiated family ego mass, where there is an unhealthy fusion of egos within the family, is basically a very rigid family pattern. Likewise, Reiss (1971) typology of of family functioning emphasizes degrees of rigidity versus flexibility in dealing with the environment. One empirical generalization growing out of the behavioral literature is that distressed marriages are characterized by rigidity in their interaction. The pattern characteristic of distressed relationships is an immediate reciprocity of spouse's behavior (Markman et al., 1981). A negative is followed by a negative, a positive by a positive. In contrast, nondistressed couples tend to follow a "bank-account" model of reciprocity - as long as there are a reciprocal number of deposits and withdrawals over the long run, reciprocity requirements have been fulfilled.

Several parallels can be made working from the present model back to the systems approach, starting with the notion of objectification. Minuchin's (1974) emphasis on establishing and maintaining clear boundaries within the family is one case in point. Another is Bowen's (1976) call for spouses to be observers of each others behavior. Support/Understanding is clearly not as emphasized by the systems theorists because they do not share the same concern with rewards and punishments. Both problem solving and behavior change skills are also not emphasized by the system theorists. Instead, they tend to emphasize contexts for behaviors rather than skill components of interaction. This last point has in some ways been recognized as a weakness of the systems approaches. Steinglass (1978) suggests that systems theorists have overemphasized the notion of control and have underutilized the notion of adaptation. The Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979) is one intermediary perspective which uses adaptability as one of its basic dimensions in deriving a family typology.

In overviewing the present model, it can be said to offer the following benefits. It is concrete and researchable. The concepts used tie into the larger body of behavioral research. Behaviorism has always been characterized by its emphasis on research. The emphasis on research could help the growth of theory and of therapy. The model systematically and hopefully in an integrated manner lays out hypotheses for guiding theory, research and practice. The concepts used in one area are theoretically tied to concepts in another. In contrast,

the approach of just generalizing from all the previous literature on marital adjustment (e.g., Lewis & Spanier, 1979) mixes conceptual systems and levels of analysis. The bridge between research and practice is a strong feature of the present paper.

The paper points to a well-known fact: theories and models determine the nature of research. In the present case, it is interesting how little research has been done which can be brought to be on the questions raised herein. Other theories or conceptual frameworks have guided past efforts. The other side of the coin is that the present framework explicitly lays out hypotheses for researchable subjects that have not been adequately investigated, yet in some way or another underlay much of the current thinking on marital therapy. Investigating these issues is integral to conceptualization of marriage from a behavior-systems perspective. A closely related research issue is how pitifully little research has been done on many of the components of marital therapy to see how essential each component is.

There are also several other advantages of the present model over its immediate predecessors in the behavioral camp. One is its ability to describe phenomena pointed to by systems theories. Jackson (1965) differentiates report and command aspects of messages. Previous behavioral approaches do not focus on multidimensional aspects of a single behavior; however, the present model focuses on the stimuli as received and, given the cognitive processing aspect of the model, it is easy to see one single overt behavior triggering different channels of internal processing. The control aspect of command messages is an interesting development of generalized expectancies for behavior, indeed a generalized expectancy for power in the dyad.

The behavioral-systems perspective has previously been offered as a conceptual framework for explaining intervention procedures (Weiss & Birchler, 1978). As a result it was formed around techniques. The model here offered is more logically detached and subsequently more integrated. Weiss (1978) tended to use terms in two different contexts and levels of analysis. For example, support/understanding is used both as a general skill and as an interaction category (e.g., Weiss, 1978: 202). Whether another reader would agree or disagree with that comment, it is the general feeling of the present writer that some of the original terms did not always have clear references and/or boundaries. The present model has opted for a logically generated, fully-crossed design where each relationship process can be applied to each area of relationship accomplishment and to each area of interaction.

Some of the more macro-sociologically oriented readers may suggest that the present model is inadequate because it does not deal with macrophenomena, e.g., socioeconomic status and social resources. The present model <u>is</u> at the micro-level. The rebuttal is two-fold: (1) All couples face problems. While one couple's problem may be financial, a second one's may be spiritual. It is the way that the couple handles its problems, whatever they are, that is of interest for a theory that can generate description, explanation, and modification to the benefit of all parties involved. (2) Issues of social class, etc. are part of the problem the couples face. It is the given couple that must handle its own problems even if social class advantages or disadvantages relative to other couples exist. Therefore it is of little value to practitioners to know that, "The higher the occupational status of husbands, the higher the marital quality" (Lewis & Spanier, 1979:279). That fact does little to help the couple, upper or lower class, who comes in for counseling. It also does little to suggest an intervention program. It should also be kept in mind that the present model implicitly carries with it the twelve interaction areas of Weiss' (1979) original model. Some of those areas refer to instrumental versus

appetitive aspects of family life.

This is not to say that society and culture are not important. They provide important mediums for our learning our interaction patterns. Moreover, the degree to which a functional set of values is learned, the more adjusted the marriage will be. Stimulus control is considered superior to response control (Weiss, 1979). The place of norms, roles, and rules in stimulus control was discussed above. Therefore, the norms of the social group play a large part in marital adjustment through stimulus control. However, in order to be functional stimulus control, the norms must be shared. It is on this point that the behavioral approach to relationship accomplishment comes closest to the more traditional approaches to marital adjustment where value consensus, especially on matters of importance to the relationship, plays a large role (Spanier & Cole, 1976). A further set of hypotheses could be generated between each of the four areas of accomplishment (objectification, support/understanding, problem solving, and behavior change) and the dimensions of marital adjustment. If Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale is used, Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Cohesion, Dyadic Satisfaction, and Affectional Expression could each be correlated with the four skill areas. Beyond the hypotheses generated above, it would be interesting to see if there were differences in which areas of relationship accomplishment predicted which aspects of adjustment.

But there is more than just interactional factors to marital adjustment. Against the framework of skills which relate to relationship accomplishment is a large set of characteristics of the individuals themselves. The organism is too infrequently studied by family scholars. The complexity of factors involved in successful marital interaction requires a large information processing capacity. More intelligent individuals should be able to see more alternative solutions and avenues for implementing them. Intelligence is an uncontrolled factor in many of the studies which show that education is related to marital adjustment. Other organism characteristics are also important. Raush and his colleagues (1974) suggest that individuals develop object relations schemata which predetermine to some extent the nature of conflict in the relationship. Yelsma (1981) presents data supporting the notion of predispositions to conflict. Many of these factors may be related to the biology of the organism.

Relationships probably fit the person X situation interaction model offered by a number of social psychologists. The argument is that behavior is a complex phenomena resulting from the interaction between individual characteristics and situational influences. The spouse makes for a situational influence. Reviews of the research have suggested that person X situation interactions account for more of the variance than do individual or situational factors themselves (Blass, 1977; Bowers, 1973).

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